

APPENDIX D

The Hilltop, Donated by Mildred and Hale Whitaker Historic Structures Report Lakeside Linkage Preserve

“Hilltop”, the Mildred and Hale Whitaker House



The Hilltop

Donated by Mildred and Hale Whitaker

Historic Structures Report - Lakeside Linkage Preserve
Contract #522677 Task Order 1, Task 3

Prepared for

San Diego County Department of Parks and Recreation
County Parks Project Manager:
Jennifer Haines: Land Use/Environmental Planner
County Parks Historian: Dr. Lynne Newell Christenson

Prepared by

ICF Jones & Stokes
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"All the years we have had the privilege of living and working this Beloved Hilltop, we have known it belongs to no one but God, our father, and we have had one prayer... that it never be broken or cut up, but that it be recognized as God's Hill. We pray that... for all of you who come to our beloved Hilltop, bring your Joys or Sorrows, Tears, or laughter, and Find Strength, Healing, Serenity, a belief in Miracles, Quiet, and a place to meditate and dream your dreams."

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Introduction

The purpose of this historic structures report is to document the Mildred and Hale Whitaker House, "Hilltop", located at 12835 Castle Court Dr Lakeside, CA 92040. The property lies inside of San Diego's County's Lakeside Linkage Preserve. This review was undertaken in the early part of 2008 by Jones & Stokes Associates under contract to the San Diego County Department of Parks and Recreation.

The current condition of the Whitaker House reveals that there is no damage, structural problems, or materials deterioration. However there is a seismic risk in using an unreinforced masonry building. A written schedule of on-going routine maintenance should be established for as long as the house is to remain unoccupied. This includes running water through all the plumbing fixtures, checking the roofing material for soundness (and immediately after any violent wind episode or storm), inspect the under floor and attic for pest infestations (a service can be contracted to take care of this work), inspect the building for cracks, settling, leaks, or other signs of structural damage, and re-roofing within ten years.

Alternatives for the property include: maintain the property in current condition, sell the house to a private party and maintain an easement over the land, lease the house to a private party with an agreement to have the house open a certain number of days per year, use the house as is for a department function such as a Park Ranger Station or Park Ranger Residence, use the house for public gatherings, or close the house and use the grounds.

Assessor's Parcel Number: 3943301900
Legal Description: POR LOT 122 TR 289
Location: 32 degrees 51'10.95 N, 116 degrees 54'52.70 W

Preservation objectives

It is the County's desire to determine the current condition of the residence and detached garage at the site, to determine the best course for their preservation and what potential uses the buildings might find to further the Department's mission, "To provide opportunities for high quality parks and recreation experiences and to preserve regionally significant natural and cultural resources."¹

History

Hale Whitaker, born in Leroy, Illinois, had lived in Lakeside since he was 3 years old. Mildred, born in Wisconsin, educated to be an executive secretary, came west, worked in San Francisco and did publicity work at a Hollywood Studio before coming to San Diego with her mother in 1931. She worked for the San Diego Harbor Department where she was in charge of purchasing. From 1932 through 1940 she also edited, arranged and published the 'Port of San Diego', a pictorial record of San Diego Port industries and activities. Mildred and Hale met at a party (that neither had wanted to attend) given by mutual friends in Lakeside on October 7, 1933, a meeting followed by courtship and marriage January 1, 1939.

Hale Whitaker purchased the hilltop from W.E. Oaks, and with wife Mildred, built a house from native moss-faced stones on the hill, affording

¹ <http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/parks/aboutus.html>

protection against the chill winds of winter and a barrier against the heat of summer. The site for the home was selected carefully. Hale cautiously bulldozed the long private road and a level area without disturbing the contour of the hill. The interior of the house combined comfort and beauty in a floor plan designed by Hale and Mildred. The focal point of the living room is an immense fireplace also made of stones, some of which came from Death Valley. It has a unique raised hearth. Construction was not a hasty thing. From its start in 1935 until its completion in July 1940, every step was carefully planned and supervised and many of the less technical jobs Hale and Mildred did themselves. Mildred dipped shingles in creosote and laid them in position on the roof and Hale followed with hammer and nails. Their teamwork also resulted in the hardwood floors throughout the house. The southwest bedroom became the personal apartment for Mildred's mother, who made her home with them until her death in 1955. The garage was constructed in 1940; it originally was located adjacent to another garage/shed according to the building permit, but that structure no longer exists.

Landscaping was done with a constant consideration for the natural look and every effort has been made to preserve the unobstructed view. The Hilltop home is surrounded by trees, shrubs and flowers, each one planted lovingly by the Whitakers. Directly in front of the house are two *Pyracantha formosa* trees. These in season are smothered with enormous clusters of bright crimson berries. The spectacular night blooming *Cereus peruvianus monstrosus* from South Africa planted in 1940 when it was a foot high, now stands more than 15 feet and bears more than 1,000 blooms in the summer. Over the years a dozen cuttings from the mother plant have been planted around the hill - some now larger than the mother. The Hilltop's Gardenia and Camellia blossoms have graced many homes, businesses, and meetings in Lakeside over the years. Little remains of the gardens today.²

Hale was a heavy equipment operator with the San Diego County Engineering Department who started when horse-drawn equipment was used to build roads. He drove the County's first motor-grader, and stayed with the County Road Department for 47 years, only taking time out from 1942-1945 to serve as a Navy Seabee³ in the South Pacific. He sent frequent packages home, among the souvenirs were baskets, vases, ocean shells, samples of jungle hardwood and innumerable other articles. During his absence, Mildred kept the home place running smoothly, keeping the steep driveway in passable condition, caring for the young trees and plants and her Siamese cats. She says, "The good Lord made our Hilltop beautiful, and we try to keep it that way."

Hale passed July 1, 1980 and Mildred followed December 28, 1992. Mildred, her mother and Hale are buried on the site.⁴

Chronology

- The house and garage were created by the homeowners over a period beginning in 1935 and continuing through 1940. The house shows no signs of modification or remodeling since its original construction.
- Numerous other rock assemblies as well as the landscaping were an on-going labor of love that continuously evolved over the next 40+ years.
- In 1955 Mildred's mother, Nellie Scharnke was buried near the house.

² From "Legends of Lakeside", Lakeside Historical Society

³ A Navy Seabee is military personnel within the United States Navy Construction Battalion, in which the name is derived from the acronym (CB). The Seabees date to World War II and are noted to build bases, bulldoze and pave several thousand miles of roadway and airstrips, and other construction projects in a variety of military theatres. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seabee>)

⁴ Dates taken from headstones on site

- In 1980 Hale Whitaker was buried on site.
- In 1992 Mildred was interred with her husband of forty-one years.

Architectural Evaluation

An assessment was made of the house and garage of all exterior and interior features and finishes.

The house is in remarkably original condition, unmodified save for the installation of modern toilets and an electrical meter panel, which is located on the primary façade west elevation. There is no obvious evidence of structural failures, cracks, settling or water stains. Original features include the fireplace, roof shingles (located underneath the composite shingles), and hardware found on the doors and cabinets. Oral history reveals an addition, or partially enclosed “lean-to”, was located on the east elevation; however, it was not built at the time of construction and was removed after the 1980s due to vandalism.

The garage shows some signs of neglect; the roof structure is beginning to come apart. However the damage is not major and is well within the skill set of any carpenter to affect matching repairs.

What makes the Whitaker house worthy of note is primarily its site. From outside the building there are spectacular views in all directions.

The house is a typical vernacular native rock assembly, not particularly well designed or planned. Construction of the exterior walls consists entirely of stacked moss-faced native stones mortared together with concrete. There is no evidence that any steel reinforcing was used. The use of modern Portland cement concrete was well established and understood by 1935. The homeowner/builder was a professional construction operator for the County and the damage to unreinforced masonry buildings was much in the news after the disastrous 1933 Long Beach Earthquake, so the decision to build an unreinforced building seems an odd choice.

The home’s interior walls are of a common wood stud, lath and plaster construction. There is no insulation in the house and no heat other than electric wall heaters in the bathrooms and the large fireplace in the living room. The rock fireplace is the house’s most interesting architectural feature. The living room also displays a stained box beam ceiling with decorative corbelling at the beam ends. The literature makes mention of the occupant’s paintings and penchant for bringing back souvenirs from world travels so it might be inferred that the house now devoid of its furnishings derived its color and texture from the décor now gone.

There are no architecturally significant spaces in the house that would hinder adaptive re-use of the property.

Interior features include the large fireplace located in the living room along the north elevation, which was composed of the same stone as the exterior walls. Architectural hardware, Bakelite cabinet pulls, metal hinges and kitchen counter tiles are all typical of the late 1930s. As noted on the floor plan, much of the house sports a hardwood floor with ceramic tiles in the bathroom and vinyl tiles in the kitchen and work room. Mildred’s design input is reflected in the kitchen, in which her favorite color, red, is the color of the tiles and hardware.

Exterior features of the property include a cemetery, which holds grave markers and the remains of Mr. and Mrs. Whitaker. The couple had many cats that are memorialized at the property with concrete and rock designs that contain embedded paw prints. West of this area, the landscape includes a concrete walkway leading to the primary entrance on the south elevation from the driveway. A visual boundary was

created between the driveway and the front yard, which was composed of native rock. A concrete patio is also located on the east elevation. A large stone and concrete structure was constructed in between the house and garage. It contains built-in stairs so that the top of the structure could be used as a patio. Positioned in front of the south elevation of the residence is a marker that has been newly erected to honor the Whitakers. The septic system is still in existence, located on the east side of the house; it is most likely the original tank and remains in use.

The Hilltop home is surrounded by trees, shrubs and flowers planted by the Whitakers as well as hardscape like cement embedded with stones and petrified wood. Existing vegetation that appears to have been planted by Mrs. Whitaker are the pines and the cypress at the south end of the hilltop, planted in 1944. The adjacent eucalyptus trees were planted in 1946. Other eucalyptus trees were planted in 1970 around what Mrs. Whitaker termed the “rock pile,” or the granitic outcrop at the southern end of the hilltop. At the north east corner of the house is a Palo Verde tree, numerous cereus cacti, palms, and a Chinese Pistachio tree. Mrs. Whitaker notes the pistachio was planted in 1971 and the Palo Verde was given to them in 1940 from Ira Philbrook. A Catoneaster bush present at the northwest corner of the house may be the same one planted by Mrs. Whitaker in 1940.

Buildings do best when they are used and occupied. At the time of this writing, the Whitaker house has been unused for approximately sixteen years. This lack of use may take its toll on the plumbing and septic systems. (Note: the location of the septic tank is undetermined as is its condition)

The period of significance for the house is 1935-1940, when Hale Whitaker constructed the residence and garage. Although the building located at 12835 Castle Court Drive retains a high degree of integrity, it is not an example of a vernacular style residence that exhibits high artistic value, or the work of a master. Therefore, it does not appear to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 3. Further, the building has no known associations with events or persons important in local, state or national history; therefore, it does not appear to be eligible for listing in the California Register under Criteria 1 or 2, respectively.

Existing Conditions

An analysis of existing conditions reveals no obvious damage, structural problems, or materials deterioration. However there is real seismic risk in using an unreinforced masonry building.

To retrofit the Whitaker House to meet seismic requirements would be an expensive and intrusive undertaking if it were possible at all. The procedure would involve removing the interior plaster from all of the rock exterior walls and one side of many of the interior walls. A steel cage of reinforcing rods would need to be affixed to the interior surface of the rock walls and a new concrete inner wall would have to be cast in place against the rock walls. The concrete wall would then need to be finished to resemble the original painted plaster finish. The wooden walls would need to be reinforced with layers of plywood to create shear walls within the structure to tie the exterior walls together and all of this new work would require new foundations within the existing footings. Much historic fabric would be lost and all the exterior doorways and window openings would be noticeably affected by walls now four to six inches thicker than before.

It is not recommended to pursue this costly and destructive work.

The residence resides on a dirt foundation with wood beam support and a veneer of local rock as exterior wall cladding. The foundation walls are currently unreinforced, as mentioned above. The house is composed of one-over-one double-hung wood frame windows, located within a

wood surround. A majority of the windows are original, except for one double hung window located in the bathroom on the east elevation; however, it still retains the original wood frame. The wood windows are in good shape with no rotting. As the walls are not reinforced, some of the windows are not supported within the stone walls, causing two windows (one on the east and west elevation) to rattle. A lean-to was constructed on the east elevation that is not original to the structure; it was removed after the 1980s due to vandalism.⁵ The electrical system has been updated from the original 1940 wiring. The garage was constructed in the same manner as the house; however, there are no windows, only a wood door and a wood garage door.

The original light fixtures and design elements located on the exterior and interior of the house (see figures 1-9) appear to be original and are in good condition. Some of the interior details include a wood beam ceiling in the large living room, decorative metal peephole on the front door, and a large intrusive fire place that is composed of the same local rock, all of which appear in good condition.

Maintenance Recommendations

A written schedule of on-going routine maintenance should be established for as long as the house is to remain unoccupied.

Routine maintenance should include:

Monthly:

Running water through all the plumbing fixtures

Bi-annually:

Checking the roofing material for soundness (and immediately after any violent wind episode or storm)

Inspect the under floor and attic for pest infestations (a service can be contracted to take care of this work)

Inspect the building for cracks, settling, leaks, or other signs of structural damage

Ten years:

Re-roofing

Proposed Work

As mentioned previously, the garage roof framing is in need of a small amount of immediate repair. Other than that the two buildings are in sound stable condition and no other maintenance is called for immediately.

It is difficult to recommend other possible changes to the structure(s) without knowing their eventual use. As the property now sits, it has inherent structural problems, visitors' safety problems and is not accessible to persons with disabilities.

⁵ Lakeside Historical Society.

Preservation Objectives & Recommendations

There are many reasons for preserving the structure as a cultural monument. A site might be associated with a famous cultural figure, may have been designed by a noteworthy designer or been the location of a momentous event in local or National history. The Whitaker house is a significant structure for its architectural integrity and style as a vernacular residence, as well as its local meaning to the citizens of Lakeside and for the possibilities that its open spaces and fantastic vistas provide.

Possible alternatives for the property, and the costs and other impacts of those uses include the following:

Alternative 1: Do nothing and maintain the property in current condition.

- Advantages
 - known and predictable on-going costs
 - no investment needed
 - no new impact on neighbors
- Disadvantages
 - property will not be used which conflicts with the donors wishes were to share “Hilltop” with the public
 - an on-going public expense without the benefit of education opportunities

Alternative 2a: Sell the house to a private party and maintain an easement over the land (Considered, but rejected).

- Advantages
 - brings money to the Department for use elsewhere in the Preserve
 - removes the burden of the property from the Department’s responsibilities
 - no new impact on neighbors
- Disadvantages
 - property will not be used by the public, donors wishes were to share “Hilltop” with the public

Alternative 2b: Lease the house to a private party with an agreement to have the house open a certain number of days per year (Considered, but rejected).

- Advantages
 - creates revenue for Department for use elsewhere in the Preserve
 - removes the burden of the property from the Department’s responsibilities, require tenant to maintain
 - best preservation of the resource, house do best when lived in
 - no new impact on neighbors
- Disadvantages

- only limited public access, donors wishes were to share “Hilltop” with the public

Alternative 3: Use the house as is for a Department function, i.e., Park Ranger Station or Residence

In this scenario the building would not be open to the public and avoids seismic and operational upgrades.

- Advantages
 - known and predictable on-going costs
 - little new investment needed
 - small new impact on neighbors
- Disadvantages
 - property will not be used, donors wishes were to share “Hilltop” with the public
 - creates a facility for which there may not be a need and adds an on-going expense with no revenue offset

Alternative 4: Use the house for public gatherings

In this scenario the house would be available for public meetings and gatherings, i.e. art exhibitions, poetry readings, neighborhood gatherings.

- Advantages
 - makes the property publically available some of the time and fulfills the donor’s wishes
- Disadvantages
 - hugely expensive, would require an almost complete rebuilding of the house to meet seismic requirements and the ADA
 - would require repaving the areas around the house for safety plus the additions of handrails and guardrails
 - would require improvements to the driveway including the following: widening and construction of retaining walls plus a turn-around area and parking near the top
 - the house does not have large rooms well suited to gatherings

Alternative 5: Close the House, use the grounds

In this scenario the house would be closed and never available for public use, but the grounds would be developed for contemplation and public use. A parking area would be developed near the base of the driveway and visitors would be expected to walk to the top. As the Whitaker’s original gardens do not survive, an opportunity exists to develop new terraces and paths on the slopes of the property near the summit that would be a fitting tribute to the wishes of the Whitakers. **(See Appendix ‘A’, Park Guell in Barcelona and Griffith Park in Los Angeles)**

- Advantages
 - makes the property publically available for educational opportunities and fulfills the donors wishes
 - costs are manageable
- Disadvantages
 - makes no use of the house or garage
 - puts a possible burden on the neighbors at the base of the hill of potential noise and pollution impacts

As touched on in the Alternatives, depending upon the ultimate use to the site and the house would likely need architectural

modifications to provide for visitor safety and to comply with the ADA. In addition, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) would like to move electrical panel to another location on building in order to retain the original design for the primary elevation.

Drawings and Photographs

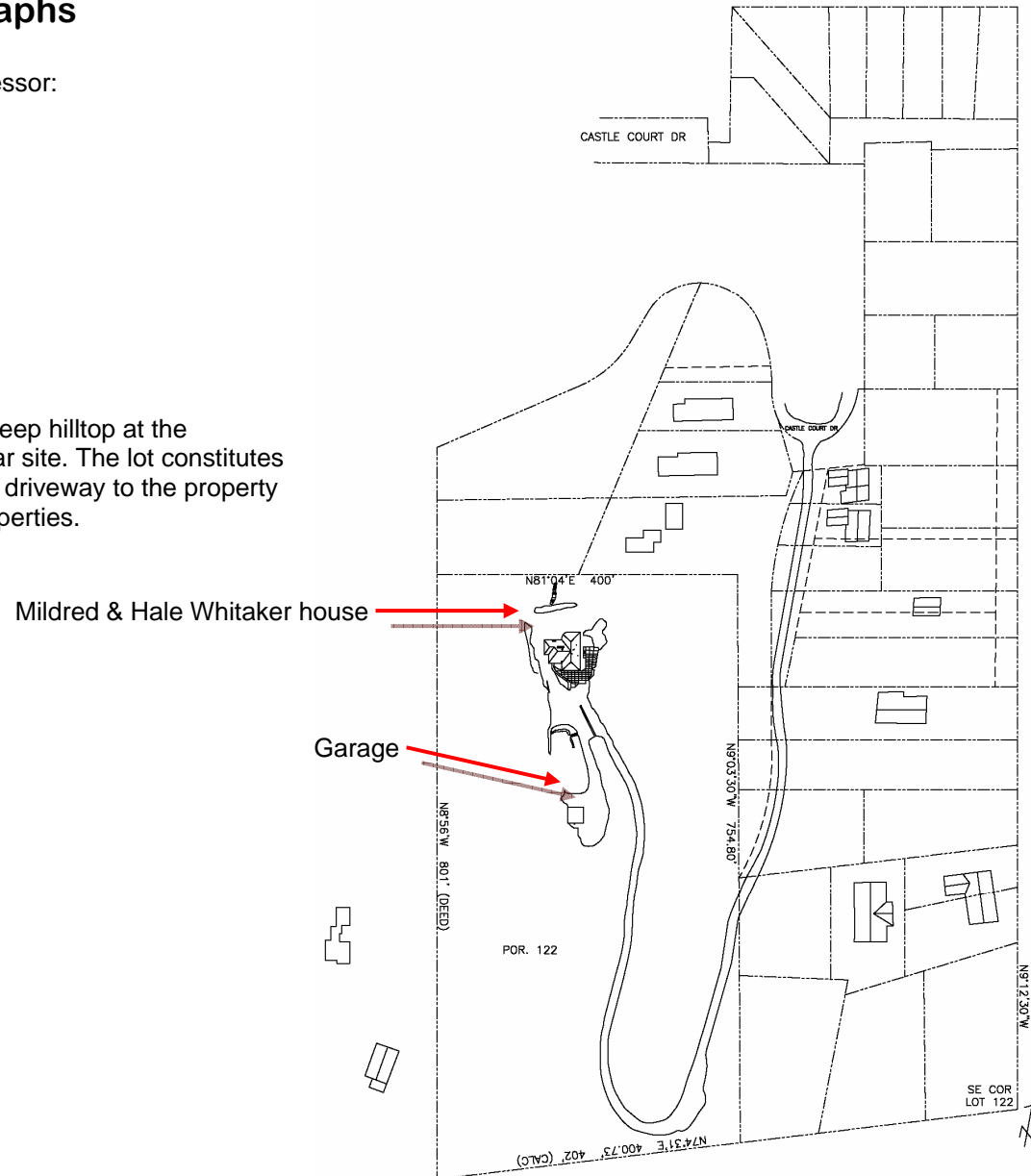
Per the records of the County Assessor:

- Built 1937
- 1, 536 square feet
- 2 bed, 2 bath
- 311,454 sq ft / 7.15 acres

Whitaker House Plot Plan

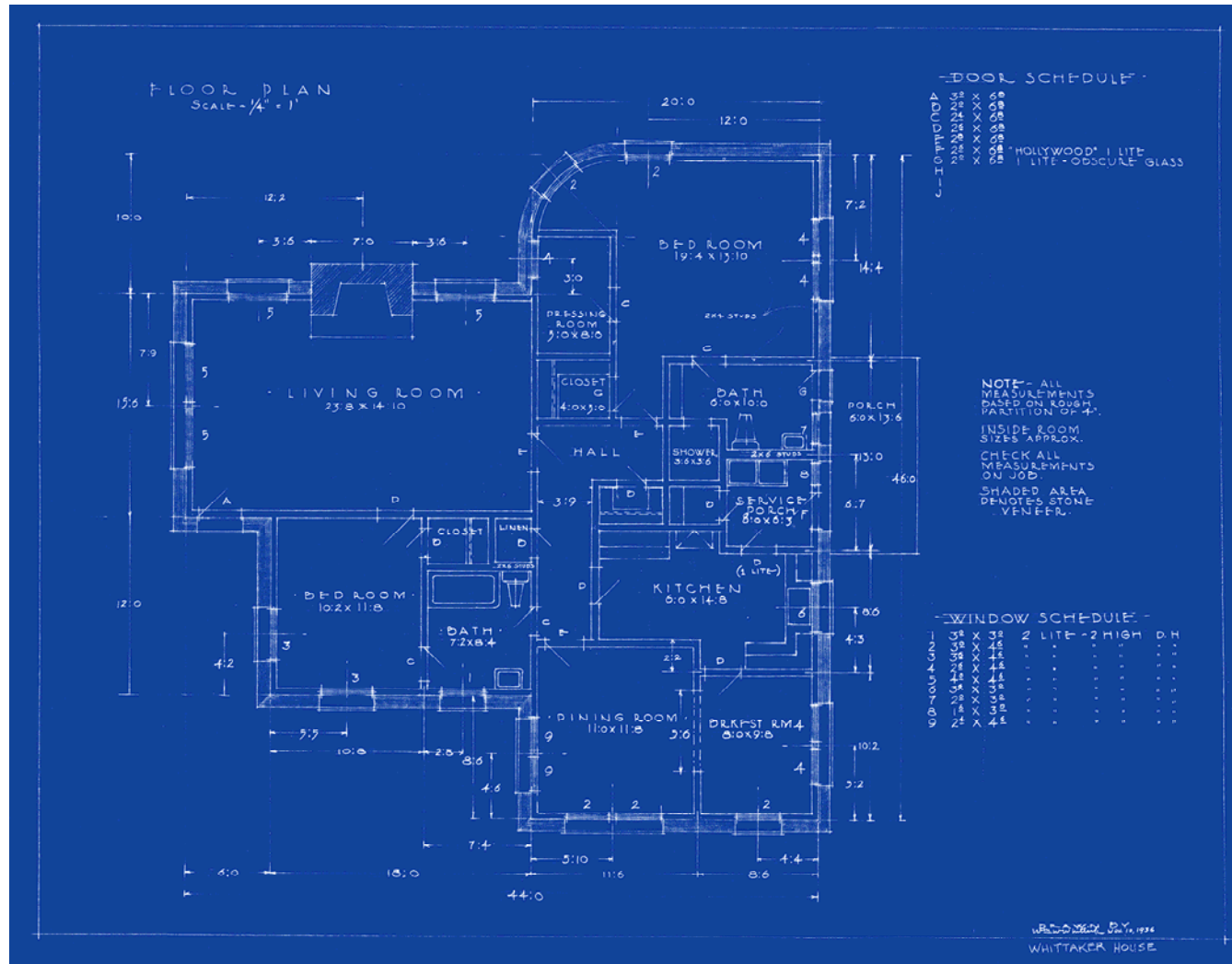
No scale

The house and garage sit atop a steep hilltop at the northerly end of a nearly rectangular site. The lot constitutes approximately 7.15 ac. The narrow driveway to the property appears to cross nine adjacent properties.



Whitaker House 1936 Floor Plan

No scale



Whitaker House Floor Plan

1/8"=1'-0"

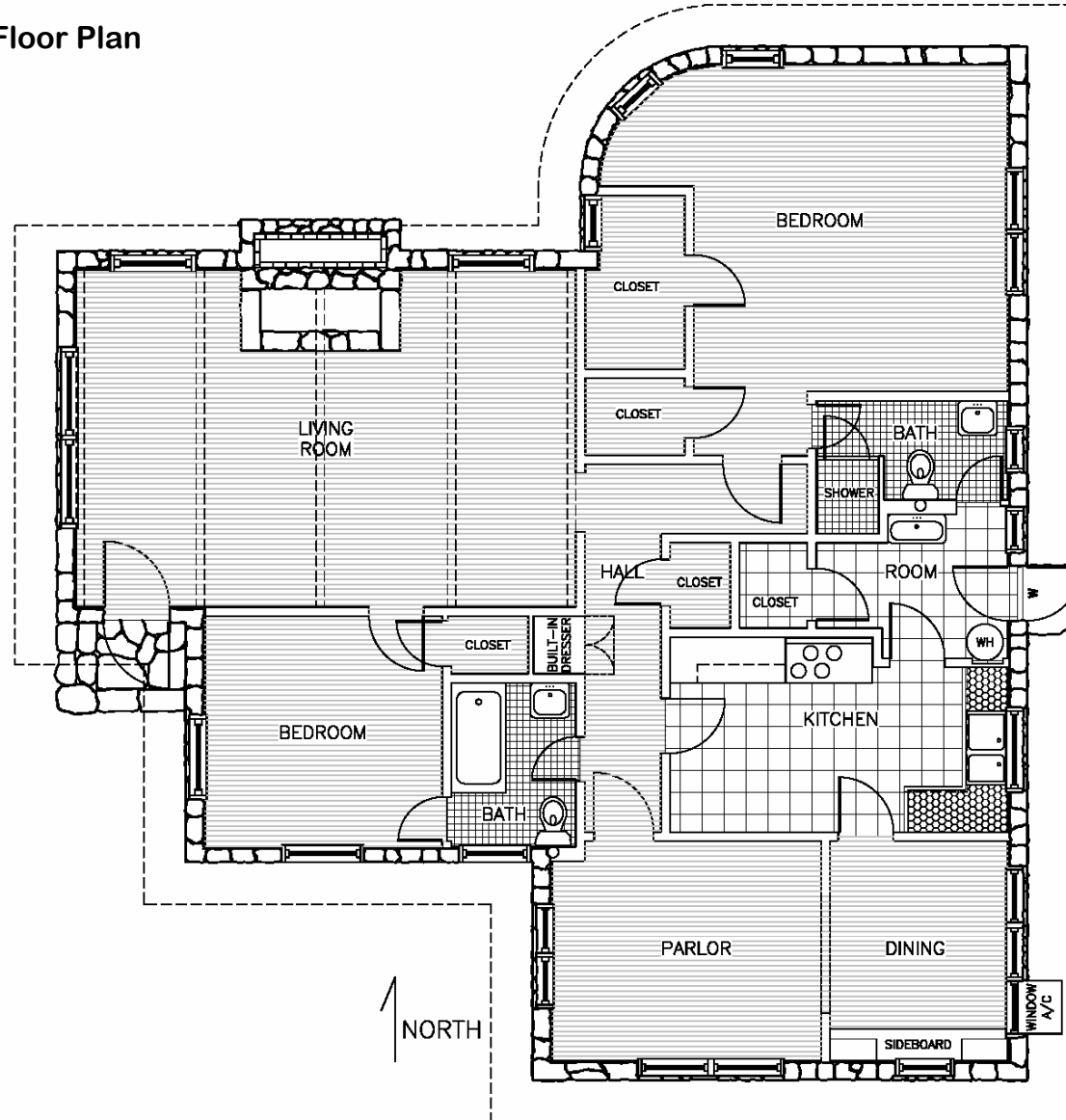




Figure 1. Kitchen, interior



Figure 2. Bakelite drawer pull.



Figure 3. Front door peephole.



Figure 4. Fireplace, composed of local rock.



Figure 5. Living room beam corbel.



Figure 6. Exterior, front porch light fixture.



Figure 7. Bathroom light fixture.



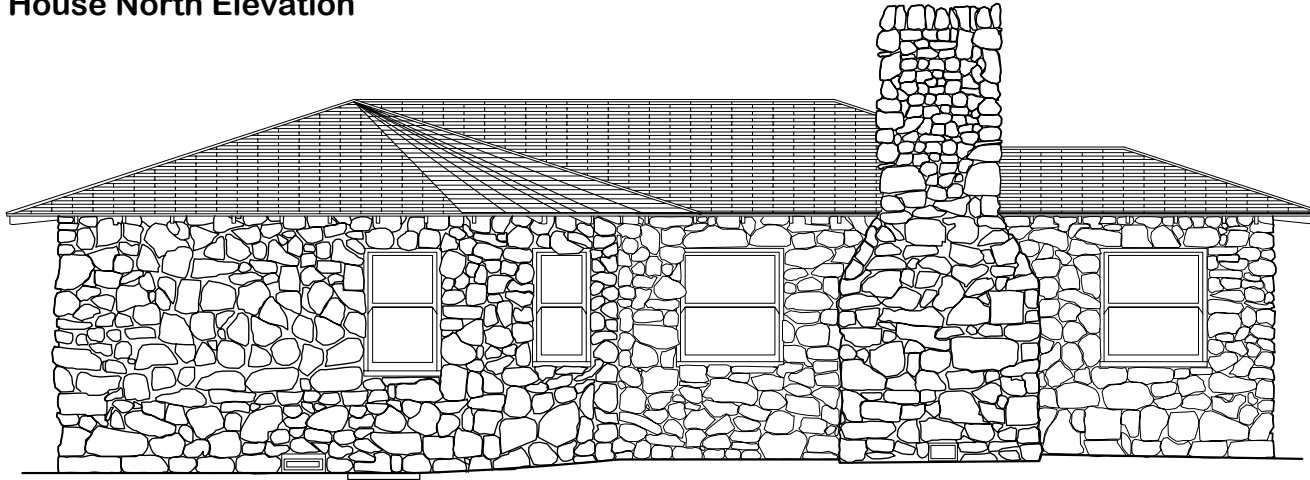
Figure 8. Light fixture.



Figure 9. Living room light fixture.

Whitaker House North Elevation

3/16"=1'-0"



North elevation is dominated by rock chimney and features an unusual $\frac{1}{4}$ round wall with conical roof element.

Figure 10. North Elevation

Whitaker House South Elevation

3/16"=1'-0"

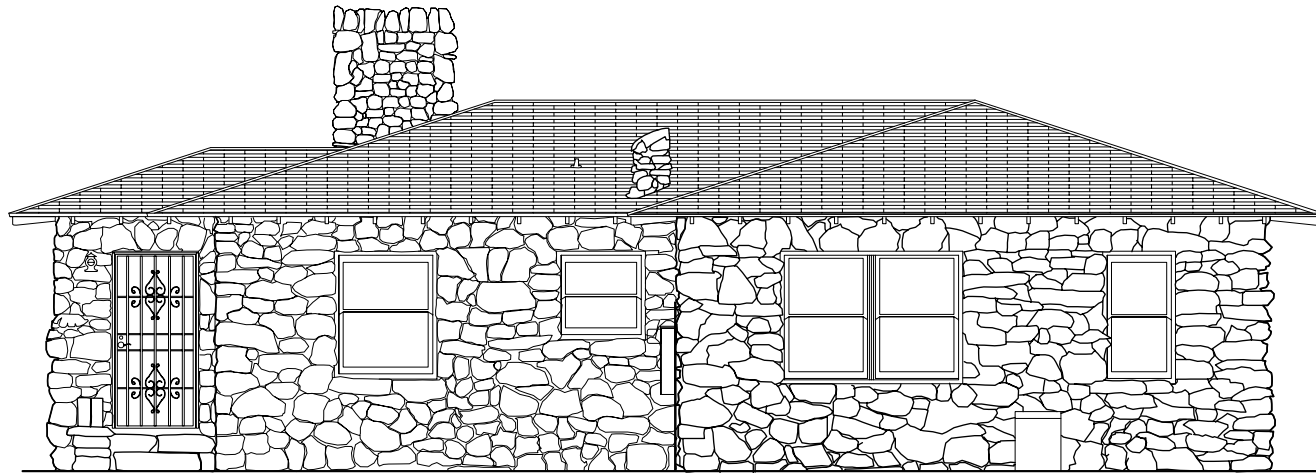


Figure 11. South elevation

South elevation is in three facets. Front door is anything but grand. A modern marker has been added next to this elevation commemorating the Whitakers and their love of this place.

Whitaker House East Elevation

3/16"=1'-0"

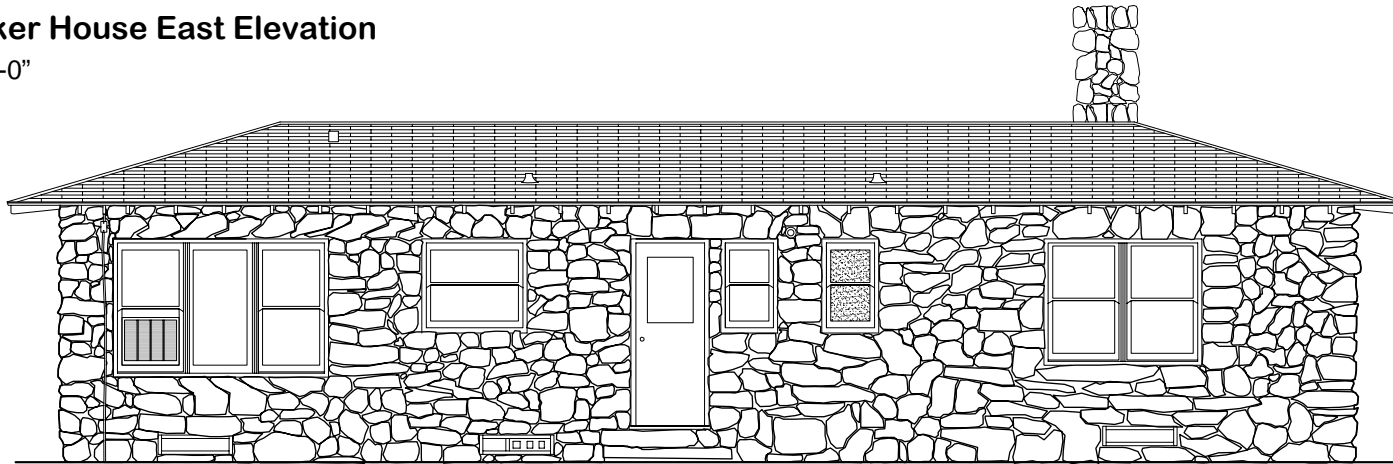


Figure 12. East elevation

East elevation was probably the functional entry for the residents as the entry door leads into a service porch with its own utility sink. The house has no heat other than period electric wall heaters in the bathrooms. A window air conditioner has been fitted into a corner of the dining room.

Whitaker House West Elevation

3/16"=1'-0"

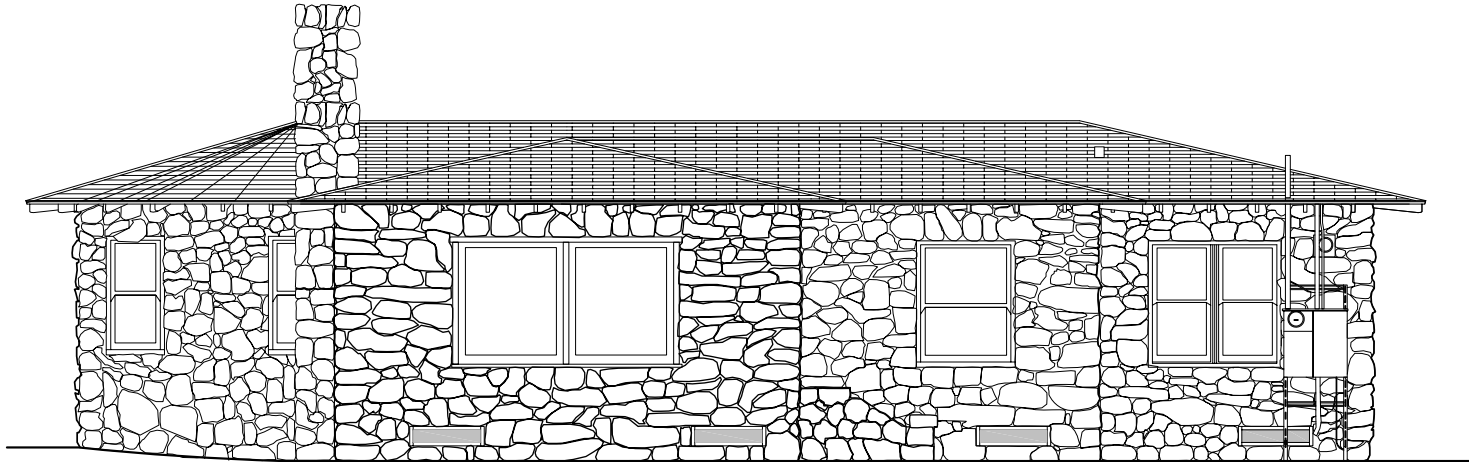
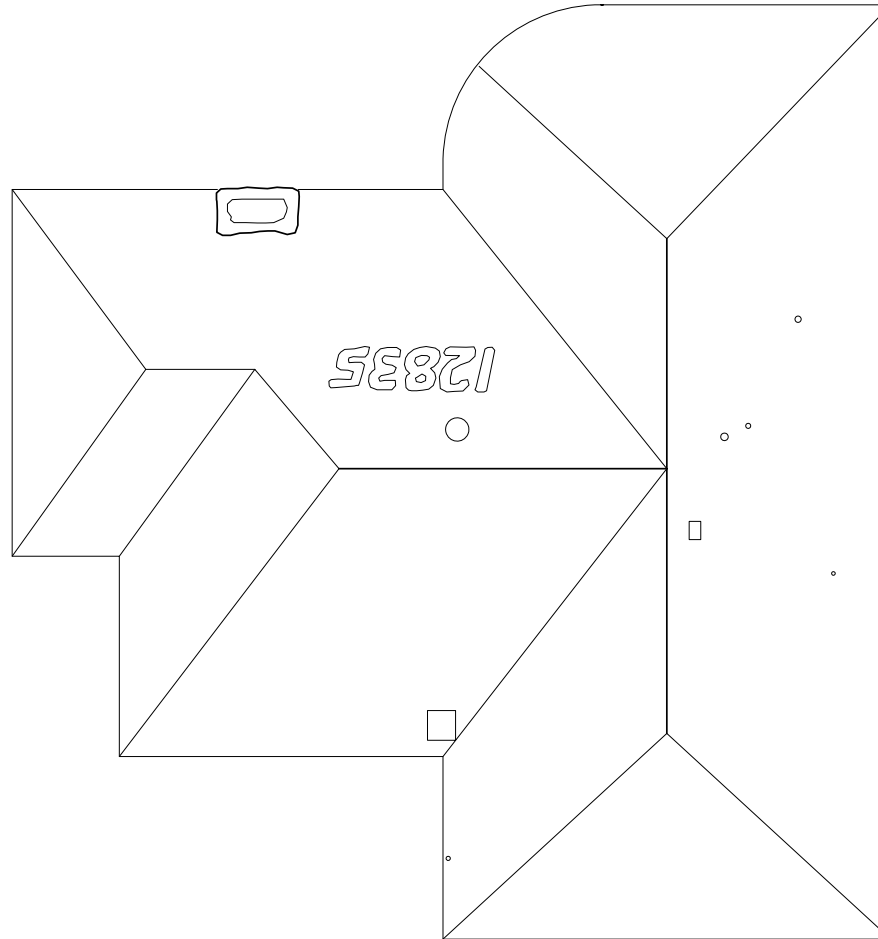


Figure 13. West elevations

Whitaker House Roof Plan

1/8"=1'-0"

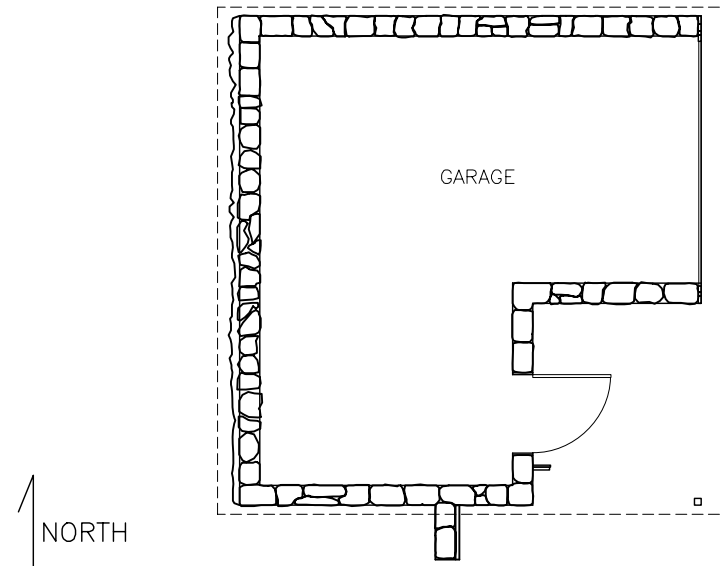


Whitaker House Garage Floor Plan

1/8"=1'-0"

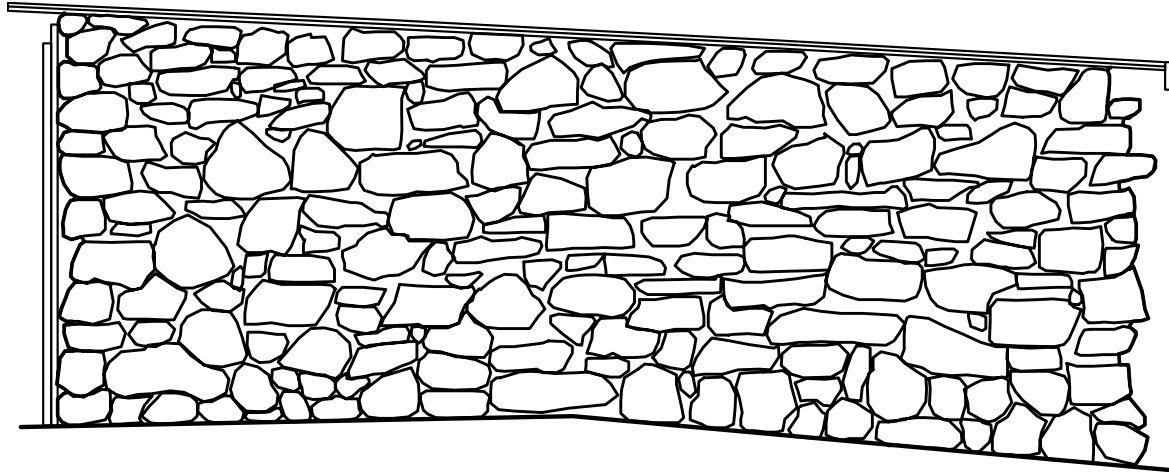


Figure 14. Photo showing relationship of Garage to House

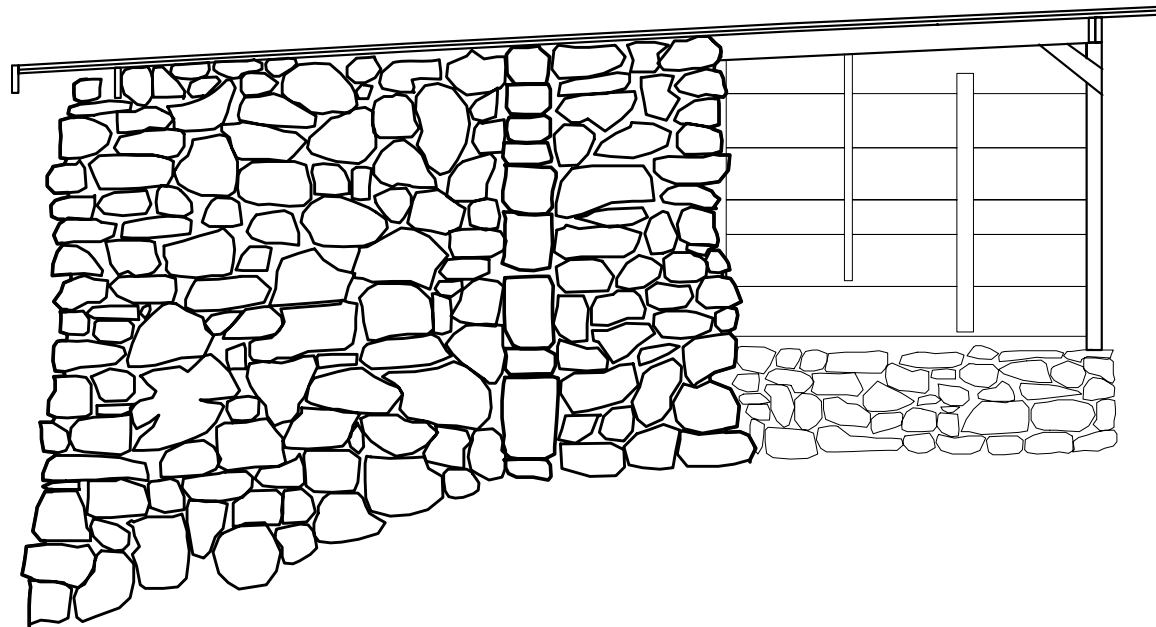


The garage is at some distance from the house and is quite small. This structure was likely used to house grounds keeping equipment, perhaps a tractor; not likely used for an automobile.

Whitaker House Garage Exterior Elevations North/South

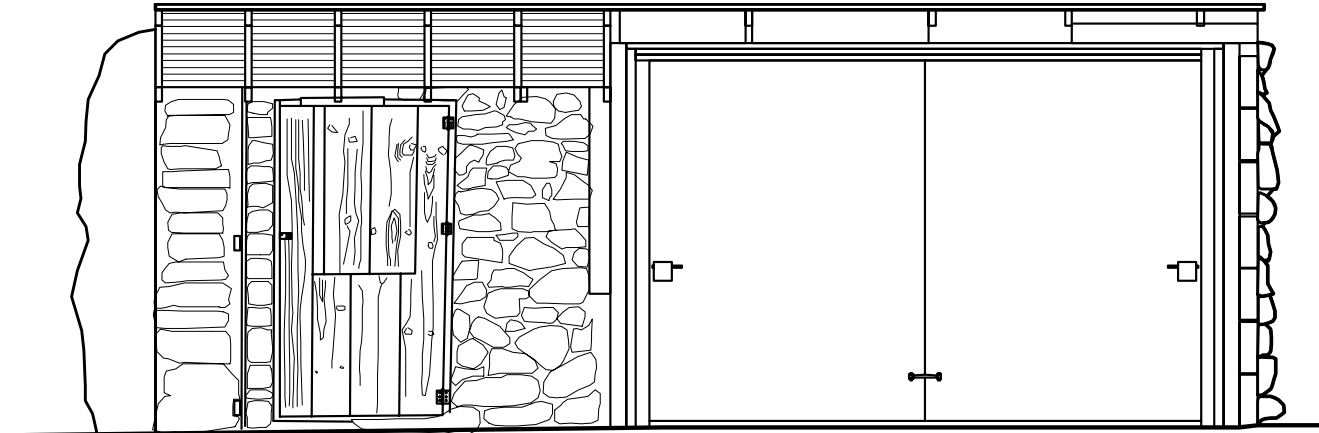


Garage North Elevation
3/16"=1'-0"

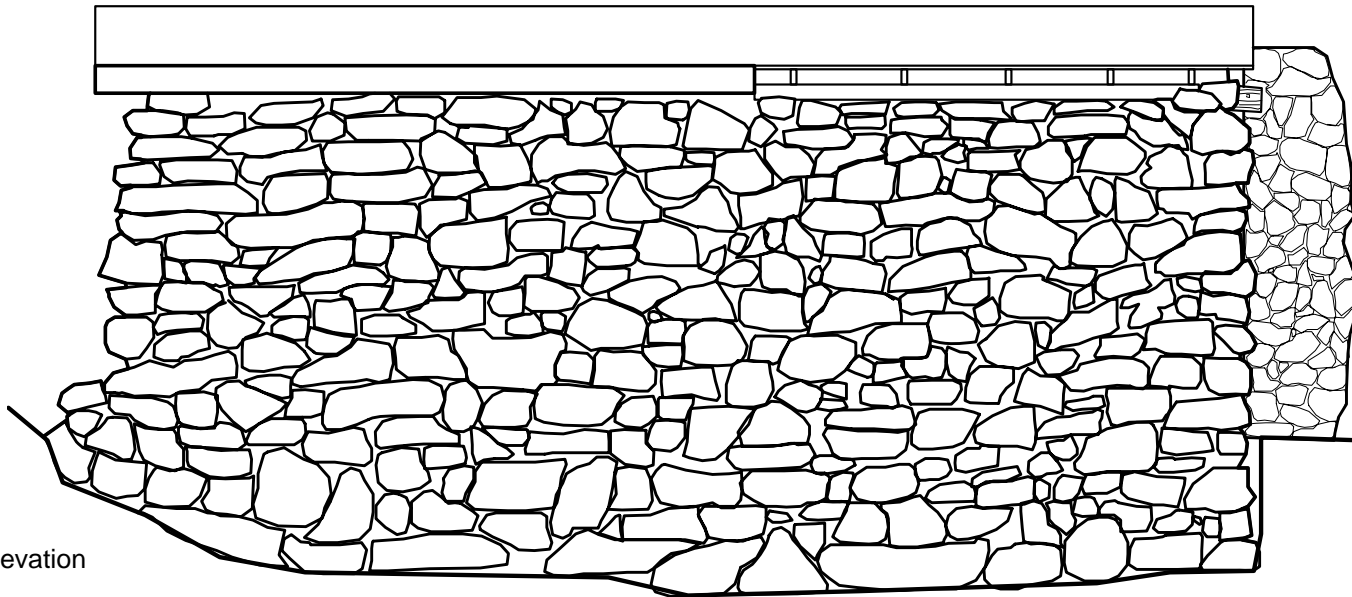


Garage South Elevation
3/16"=1'-0"

Whitaker House Garage Exterior Elevations East/West



Garage East Elevation
3/16"=1'-0"



Garage West Elevation
3/16"=1'-0"

Appendix 'A'

International example: Park Guell, Barcelona, Spain

The Park Guell could serve as a model for a public use of the Whitaker property. Each weekend it draws crowds from the surrounding neighborhood; there are no attractions in the park, any rides or athletics, it is simply a large public open space of very carefully architected spaces, stairways and terraces.



Stone gatehouses at the entry to the Park are not used as buildings, but as in any good English garden, they serve as objects and artifacts to delight the eye. Such could be the role of the Whitaker house in the Lakeside Linkage Preserve, no longer usable as a house but there as one of many objects in a carefully designed landscape.



Other views of Park Guell that serve as a design inspiration for the property surrounding "Hilltop"

Regional example: Griffith Park Ranger Station, Los Angeles, California

The Griffith Park Ranger Station could serve as a model for a public use of the Whitaker property. It is used as a daily basis, in which it draws crowds from not only the surrounding neighborhoods but Los Angeles metro area. At the large scale of the park, it is not only a large public open space of very carefully architected spaces, stairways and terraces, but due to its large scale, it also contains playgrounds, train rides, and museums. The 1853 *Feliz Adobe*, which is the oldest building in Griffith Park, is currently used as the Park Ranger Station. In addition, the park also has a few residential buildings which have been converted into residences for park rangers.



Ranger House, c. 1938.



Landscaped Park Area.



Feliz Adobe, current park ranger station.

Although Griffith Park is much larger in scale, it is very comparable to the Whitaker House as it could serve the County Park Rangers as a single residence or as the Ranger Station to serve the former Whitaker properties and surrounding Department of Parks and Recreation land. Griffith Park is also separated into several sections, many of which are similar in scale to Lakeside Linkage.

**Historic Structures Report – Addendum
Lakeside Linkage Open Space Preserve**

Mary Jane Coulter (1869-1958) was a nationally known master architect who designed and constructed buildings for the Harvey House and the Grand Canyon National Park. She was chief architect and decorator for the Fred Harvey Company from 1902 to 1948. Many of her structures were unreinforced masonry structures located on hilltops or at the edge of a canyon to take in the view. Ms. Coulter took direct inspiration from the landscape and the surrounding hilltops served as part of the basis for the developing artistic aesthetic. At the Grand Canyon Coulter designed the Bright Angel Lodge, Hermit's Rest, Hopi House, the Lookout Studio and Watchtower. She also designed Phantom Ranch, the guest ranch at the bottom of the canyon along the Colorado River.

The Hale and Mildred Whitaker house was built with the inspiration and in the spirit of Mary Jane Coulter. Hale and Mildred were married in Yavapai County, AZ just south of Grand Canyon National Park. They spent many vacations in the area. Interior decorations for their house included many Navajo rugs and other items obtain during these visits. The important construction attributes of the Whitaker House show the Mary Jane Coulter effects.

Exterior

The Whitakers designed a simple, sturdy, and comfortable rock house. The original plans show that William W. Whitaker drew them, not Ms. Coulter. But it is obvious she was the inspiration for the design. The placement at the top of a hill mimics her structures, such as Hopi House and Lookout Studio. Many of her buildings are made of stone and have free-formed designs. However, when she did design traditional structures they look very much like the Whitaker House.

Bright Angel Lodge (Courtesy National Park Service)



Phantom Ranch Original Lodge (Courtesy National Park Service)



Cabin 11 at Phantom Ranch (Courtesy National Park Service)



Fireplace

The fireplace in the Whitaker House living room is the focal point of the interior of the house. It is made of stones from varied locations. While the design is not the same as the Geologic fireplace at Coulter's Bright Angel Lodge, both fireplaces boast the same idea of using rocks from varied locations.

Geologic Fireplace at Bright Angel's Lodge (Courtesy National Park Service)

